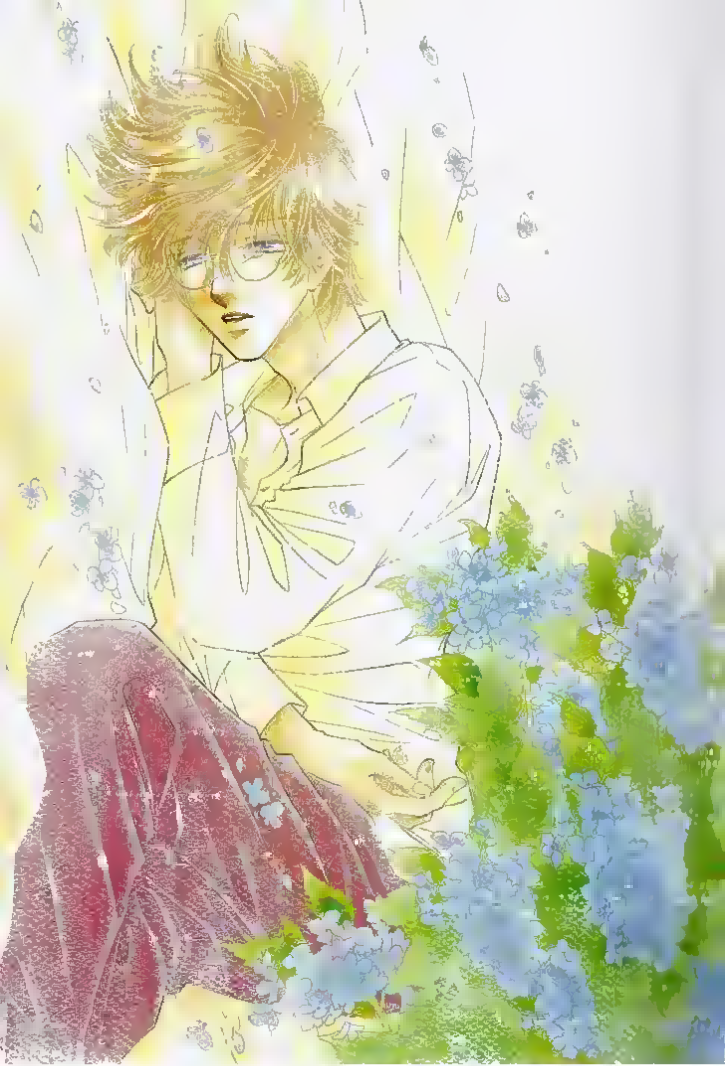

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Polar Bear

4

Chifumi Ochi

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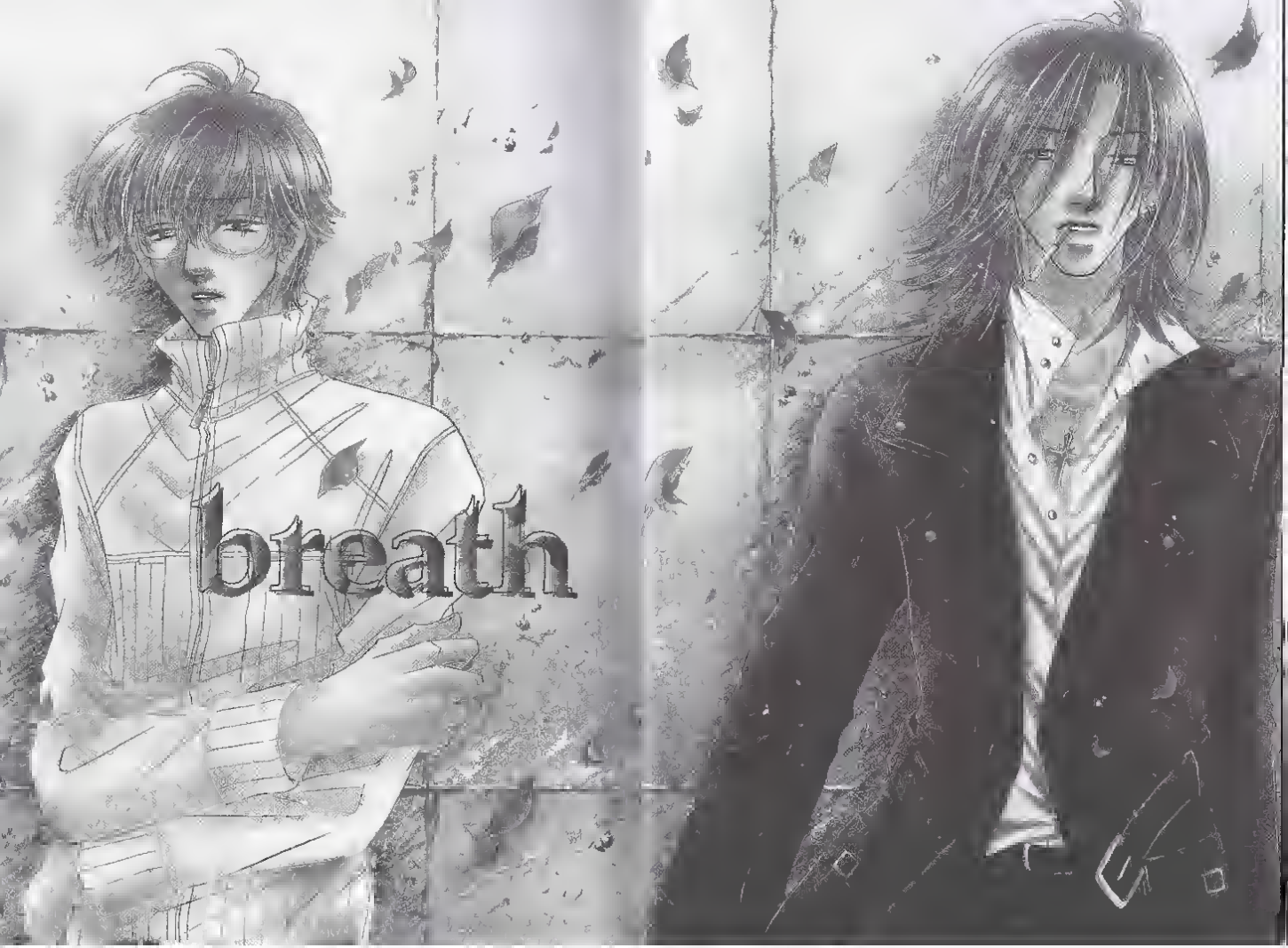

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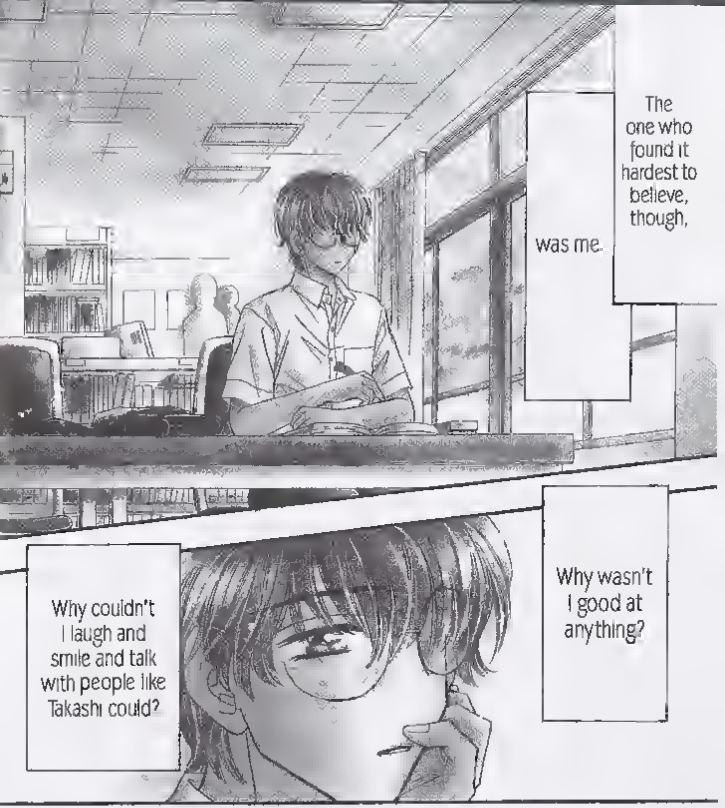
The one who found it hardest to believe, though,
was me.
Why wasn't I good at anything?
Why couldn't I laugh and smile and talk with people like Takashi could?

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Woo hoo!
Over this way!
GUESS I'LL HEAD HOME.
XOXO
I've simply always been that way
This is breath volume 1.
Remember how I said in the last postscript that this would be the last volume?
Well, it's not.
I just thought I should get the apology out of the way first
ha ha ha
back to his younger ways

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Hey!
WE COULD REALLY USE SOMEONE LIKE YOU AS OUR TEAM MANAGER.
GUH.
You'd be a life-saver!
THAT'S IT!
YOU SHOULD TOTALLY BECOME OUR MANAGER, KIRISHIMA!
HUH?
Never skipping class, always seeing things through
BY THE WAY, YOU WERE A MAJOR HELP AT LAST YEAR'S COMMITTEE MEETING.
ER...
IT WAS NO BIG DEAL
OKATA!
QUIT CHATTING AND GET BACK TO THE GAME!
L BE GHT ERE!
Pass the ball back!
AND IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE A PART OF ANY OTHER CLUBS, RIGHT?
UH...
Y-YEAH
THEN IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE!
THERE'S NO RULE SAYING THAT MANAGERS HAVE TO BE GIRLS, RIGHT?
THINK ABOUT IT.
Nope nope
HUH?
WHA-?

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...
EASIER
SAID THAN DONE
SEE YA LATER, THEN!
ANYWAY, JUST PROMISE ME YOU'LL THINK IT OVER.
But maybe he has a point.
Unlike Takashi, I'm no good at sports,
so I'd always crossed out sports clubs as a possibility.
But being their *manager*...
DASH
What took you so long?
Sorry!
BUT-!

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But no matter how much I thought about saying yes,
I never had the confi dence to speak up
...
Maybe it's not com pletely out of the question
And at least I'd be in the same club as senpai
Besides, he'd just come up with the idea on the spot.

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NOW, IF ONLY YOU WOULD BRING HOME SOME FRIENDS ONCE IN A WHILE, TOO.
YES, MOTHER.
AS LONG AS YOU'RE HEADING UPSTAIRS, COULD YOU TAKE THIS WITH YOU?
=
tmp
tmp
tmp
TAKASHI?
MOM WANTED ME TO BRING THIS UP FOR YOU-
catch

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AW, SHOOT.
CAN'T BELIEVE HE GOT AWAY
Thanks for having me!
thud thud thud thud
OH, WELL.
GUESS I CAN'T BLAME HIM, THOUGH.
AFTER BEING SEEN IN SUCH A COMPROMISING POSITION LIKE THAT, I MEAN
HUH?
AFTER ALL,
IT'S JUST WRONG...

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...FOR TWO BOYS TO KISS
YOU CAN'T GET AROUND THE FACT THAT IT'S ABNORMAL.
...!
WHO KNOWS, PEOPLE COULD START CALLING HIM A FAG OR SOMETHING
AND NO ONE LIKES THAT.
...!
NO! I WOULD NEVER-
YEAH.
I KNOW YOU WOULDN'T.

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I WAS AFRAID YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND
AFTER ALL, UNLIKE ME,
YOU'D NEVER DO THOSE KINDS OF THINGS, RIGHT?
GOOD.
DOING THINGS LIKE THAT WITH OTHER BOYS...
...IS UNNATURAL AND WRONG.
HUH?

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IF YOU EVER DID DO THAT...
.. AND MOM OR DAD FOUND OUT, IT'D MAKE THEM SICK TO THEIR STOMACHS.
AFTER ALL, YOU'RE THE GOOD BOY, ARATA
IT'D BREAK THEIR HEARTS.
BUT I'M JUST GLAD YOU UNDER-STAND ME
YEAH... RIGHT.
YOU'RE THE BEST, ARATA.

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And like always
I found myself without company.
...was because he was nothing less than charming.
I saw Takashi with dozens of new lovers.
Soon, i was constantly de pressed
The reason people were always attracted to Takashi
C'mon There's nothing wrong with being a little unsocial
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT.
That's what a friend once told me
AND, YOUR LITTLE BROTHER IS, WHO HE IS
YOU'RE WHO YOU ARE,
SO WHY DO YOU KEEP COMPARING YOURSELF TO THAT?
NO ONE CAN GET ALONG WITH EVERYONE ALL THE TIME

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There was no changing that fact.
Everyone loved Takashi.
But it didn't help.
And I knew that
For crying out loud
you're hopeless.
But sometimes, it was too much even for me to take
Why?
Why...?

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I'M SORRY. I JUST DON'T HAVE MUCH OF AN APPETITE
...
BESIDES, I LIKE DOING THIS
I'LL SLEEP ALL I WANT WHEN YOU LEAVE FOR WORK
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
BUT...
I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN WORKING ALL NIGHT, SO...
LOOK, Y-YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE ME BREAKFAST
YOU SHOULD GET YOUR REST.
HUH?
NO APPETITE?
ARE YOU FEELING SICK?
MAYBE YOU HAVE A FEVER OR SOMETHING.
feel

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I JUST FEEL LIKE
PARTYING MY ASS OFF.
YOU'RE NO FUN AT ALL
FIRST YOU THROW ME OUT OF YOUR HOUSE, AND NOW THIS?
OUCH. THAT WAS LOW
And you didn't have to set off the alarm like that
HEY, IT'S WHAT YOU DESERVE
BUT, WHATEVER.
lick
clink

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Childhood

Im so glad I finally got to write about Arata and Takashi's childhood together. (when they were in junior high). especially because I was worried it wouldn't work with the development of the story.(^^;)

Honestly, though I get to pretty much write whatever I want for this series!

Thanks Ai-san! (≧)

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I stay late at the office until Ten leaves for work...
Then in the morn-ings,
I leave before he gets back
I'm the worst kind of brother there is.
Arata?
But...
...it's too painful being around him.
I can't believe... I'm avoiding him all because...

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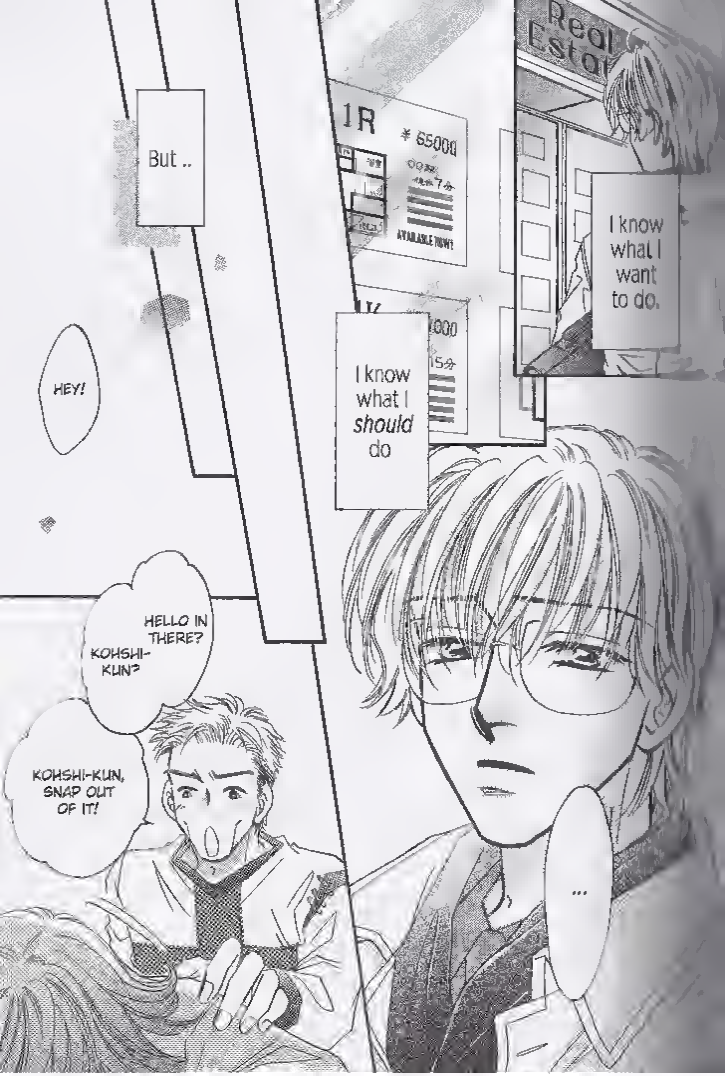

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THANKS FOR JOINING THE LIVING
I HAVE TO CLOSE THE BAR SOME-TIME THIS MILLEN-NIUM, MIND YOU
...
NOW THEN,
AS FOR YOUR BILL,
I'LL JUST HELP MYSELF TO YOUR WALLET.
AKKUN... DID I...
DID I SAY ANY-THING JUST NOW?
HM?
YES, JUST SOME NONSENSE WHILE YOU WERE IN LA-LA LAND
COULDN'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF IT
beep beep beep beep
All done!
Thank you so much for your busi-ness! :)
...
WOULD YOU PAY ATTENTION FOR EVEN ONE MINUTE?

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AND I'VE HEARD YOU'VE BEEN BRINGING HOME EVERY MAN YOU CAN GET YOUR HANDS ON
GIVE ME A BREAK, WOULD YOU?
DON'T YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN HITTING THE BOOZE A LITTLE TOO HARD LATELY?
I SWEAR, YOU ARE A HANDFUL
IT'S LIKE YOU CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF PARTYING
DO I REALLY NEED TO EXPLAIN?
WRECK-LESSLY? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I BEG TO DIFFER, YOUNG MAN
Pssh
SURE YOU PLAYED AROUND SOME BUT NEVER THIS WRECKLESSLY.
PARTYING'S NOTHING NEW TO ME.
Excuse me?

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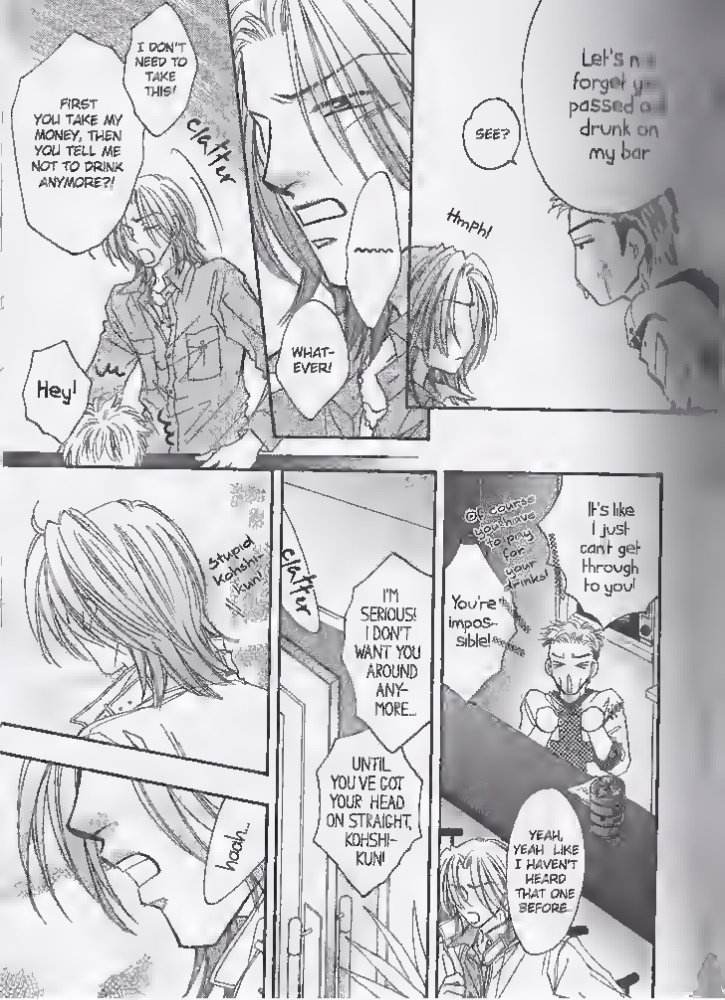

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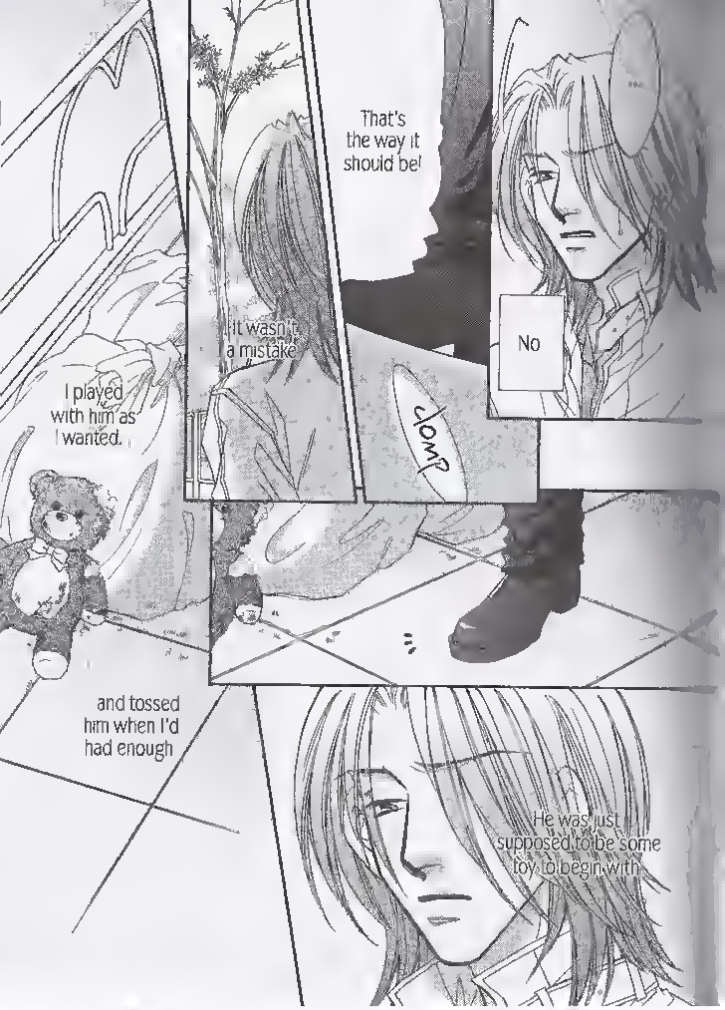
That's the way it should be!
No
It wasn't a mistake
I played with him as I wanted.
DUMP
and tossed him when I'd had enough
He was just supposed to be some toy to begin with

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AND HE'S LOOKING AWFULLY PALE
IT'D EVEN BE A STRETCH TO SAY THAT HE'S EATING AT ALL
What could be the problem, I wonder?
I see. NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT
BUT I THINK KIRISHIMA-SAN HASN'T BEEN FEELING TOO WELL LATELY
I WONDER
HUH
MAYBE HE WENT TO THE RESTROOM.
Or to hit up the vending machine
fwoosh
MEN
huff!
huff!
huff!
huff!

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SO, TO WHAT DO I OWE THE PLEASURE?
SOMETHING GOING ON?
Actually, yeah
I was so nervous you wouldn't remember me when I called
hahaha!
NAH, HOW COULD I FORGET?
Speak
SURE I REMEMBER YOU!
Really? Oh thank god
Flick
AND YOU WANT ME TO COME ALONG, IS THAT IT?
Is it too much to ask?
Sweet!
NOT AT ALL! SOUNDS LIKE FUN
And the thing is, I'm single,
so I'm worried I'll be a third wheel.
UH-HUH?
but now he's bringing his boyfriend
See, I had plans to go drinking with a friend,

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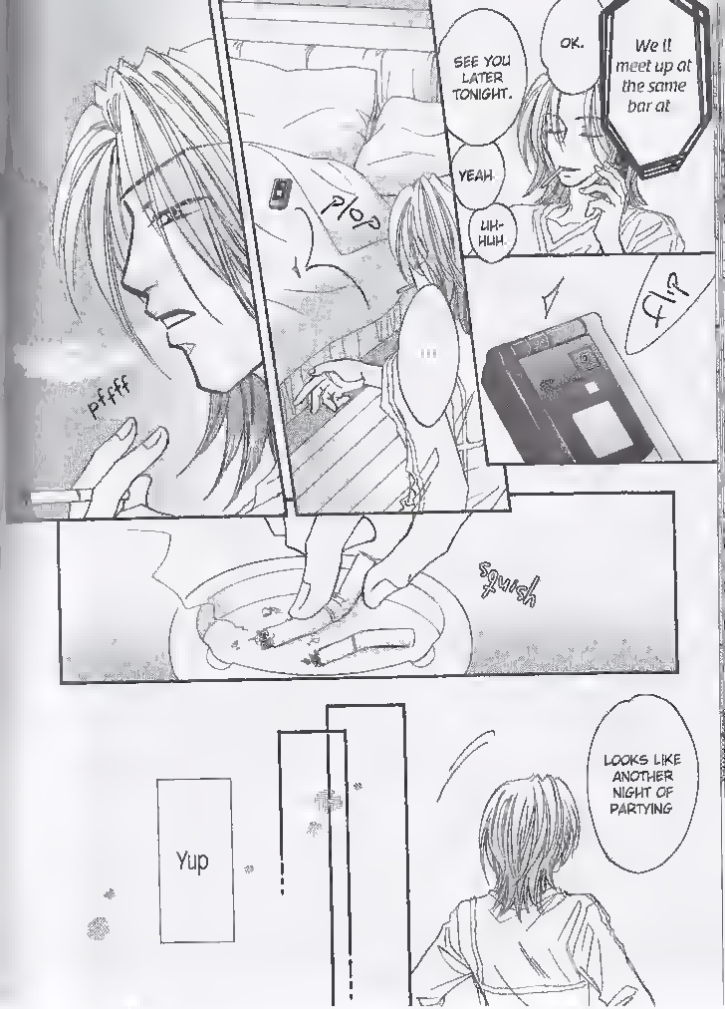

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Share a few drinks and some pointless conversation
Maybe find some guy who catches my fancy
I go ou drinkin at nigh
And if we're both feeling up to it, we'd find a cheap hotel
And the rest goes without saying
Heh heh

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SO, KIRISHIMA-SAN
WHAT WILL YOU BE HAVING?
The skewered persimmons sample platter? Dried squid? Horse mackerel? Hirabesque greenling fish? Pork stew? Fried chicken?
THEY SERVE THE BEST STEWS HERE!
And their smell comes fresh from the grill!
C'mon! C'mon! C'mon!
MEN
ARA!
THERE YOU ARE
SO, IS KIRISHIMA-KUN DIGGING INTO HIS FOOD?
Erm
MORE LIKE PECKING AT IT
IT'S ALMOST LIKE HE CAN'T EAT
IT'S ENOUGH WORK GETTING HIM TO PUT THE FOOD IN HIS MOUTH, BUT IT'S LIKE HIS THROAT WON'T SWALLOW IT.
Like the muscles just aren't working right
WELL, THAT'S NO GOOD!
The reason he brought him out here was to make him eat!
I KNOW THAT, BUT.
I THINK I KNOW WHAT THIS COULD BE.
Let me guess.
THAT HE'S BEEN DUMPED BY A GIRL
Right?
Oops!
68

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I'M GOING TO HEAD HOME NOW, GUYS.
OF COURSE BE CAREFUL, THOUGH.
SORRY AGAIN FOR RUINING THE EVENING
DON'T SWEAT IT!
YOU JUST GET SOME REST AND RELAX AT HOME.
There's always next time!
See you next week!
...
Like I've been "dumped," huh?

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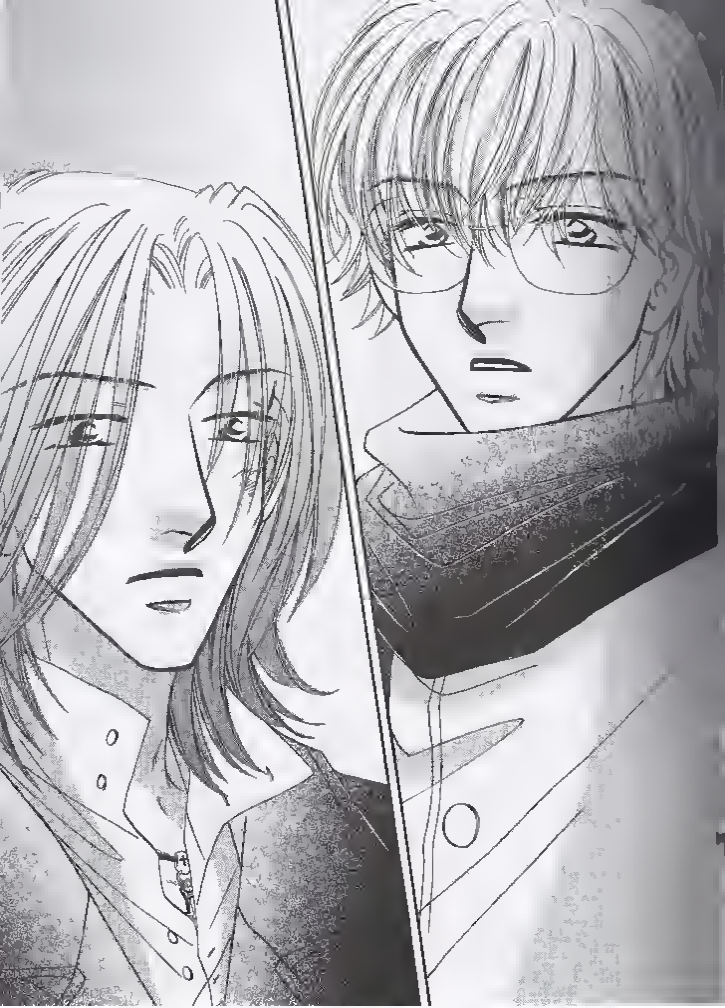

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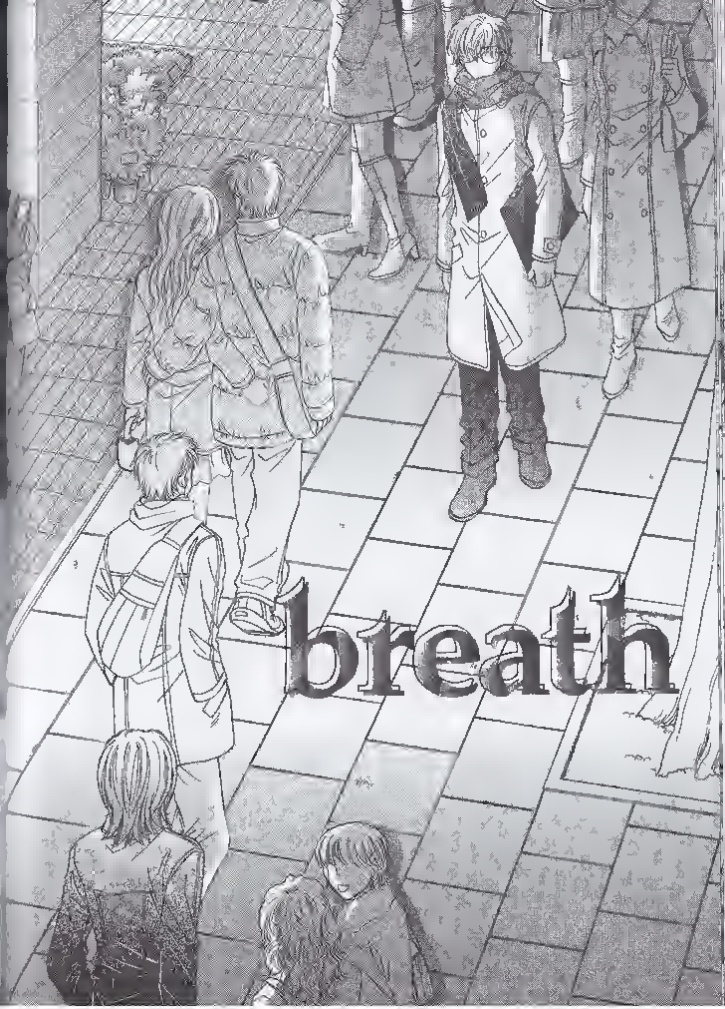

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Snow White

This time I managed to fit another story in the back of the book, though it has no relation to the actual story. I've been dying to write something with frilly dresses and ribbons and jewels and castles and stuff for years now! (^o^)

And omigod, it was soooo much fun to write! Ten-chan feels so much more powerful in this spin-off than the main story. (O_O)

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Ten-chan! It's about time!
Why haven't you come in for work yet?
Your shift started nearly an hour ago!
Jeez
ARATA?!
I'M NOT COMING IN TONIGHT.
What?!
Don't joke with me! You know how hectic the weekends get around here!
There's no way I can handle it on my own.
SHOVE IT UP YOUR ASS
Squish

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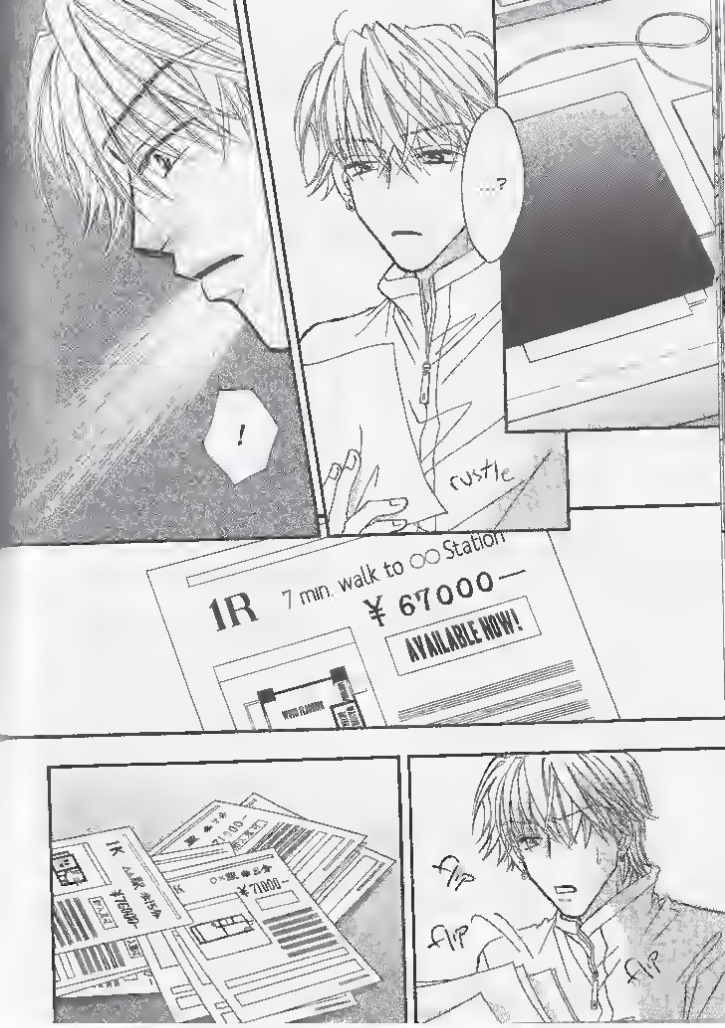

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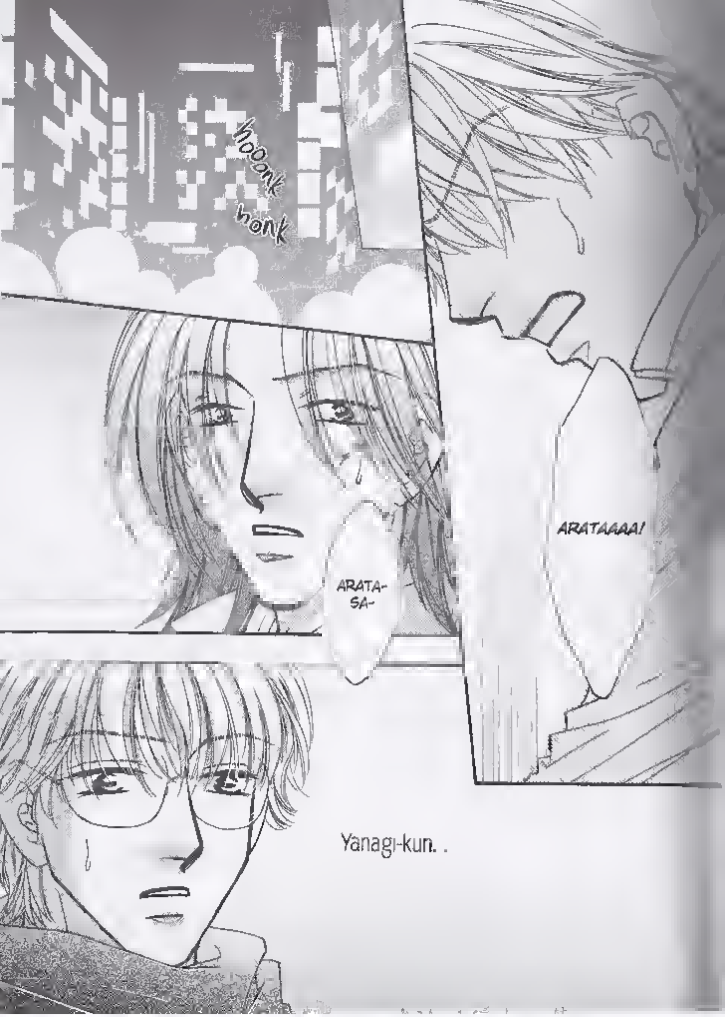

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look
UH, WHERE IS "HERE"?
A HOTEL?
YEAH
IT WAS THE CLOSEST ONE TO WHERE I FOUND YOU.
I COULDN'T JUST LEAVE YOU THERE
AND WHEN YOU WEREN'T RESPONDING TO MY VOICE
I FIGURED THAT BRINGING YOU HERE WAS THE BEST CHOICE
...
ONLY BITS AND PIECES.
IT'S ALL FUZZY.
DON'T YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING?
HE GAVE YOU A SHOT.
THEY EVEN HAVE A DOCTOR ON THE PREMISES.
I'M A REGULAR HERE SO IT WAS EASY GETTING A ROOM.

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ANYWAY, THE DOCTOR TOLD ME...
...THAT THE REASON YOU PASSED OUT WAS FROM MALNUTRITION AND DEHYDRATION.
THAT'S WHY HE HOOKED YOU UP TO AN IV DRIP FOR A BIT.
...
HAVE YOU BEEN SKIPPING MEALS AGAIN?
UH...!
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.

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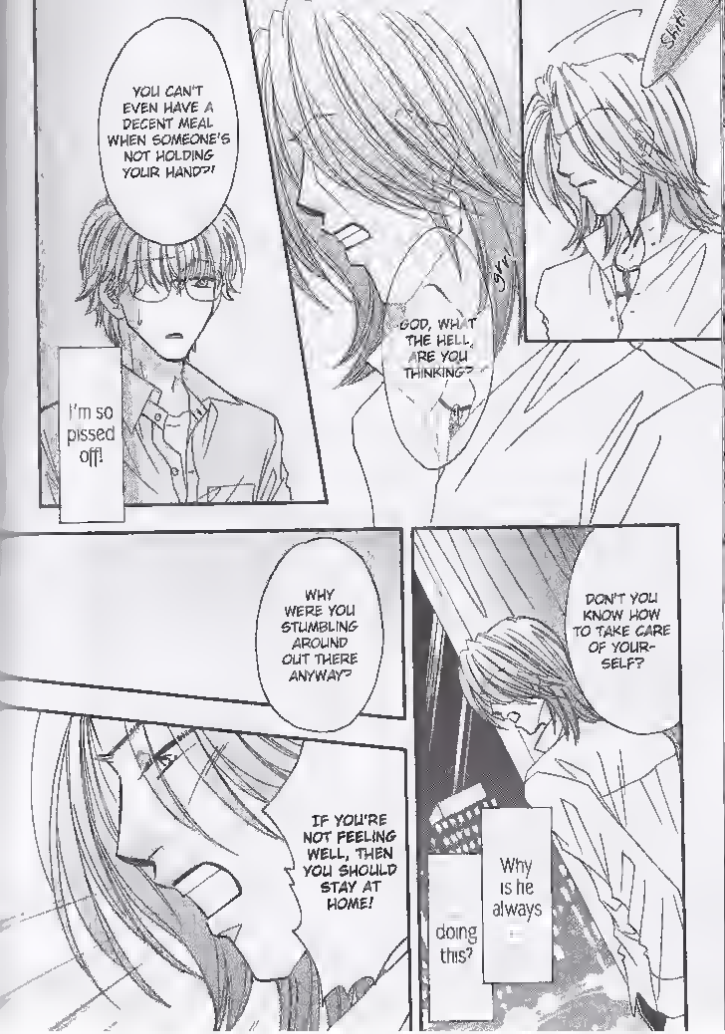
YOU CAN'T EVEN HAVE A DECENT MEAL WHEN SOMEONE'S NOT HOLDING YOUR HAND?!
I'm so pissed off!
GOD, WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU THINKING?
SHH
WHY WERE YOU STUMBLING AROUND OUT THERE ANYWAY?
IF YOU'RE NOT FEELING WELL, THEN YOU SHOULD STAY AT HOME!
DON'T YOU KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?
Why is he always doing this?

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I THOUGHT ABOUT...
...GOING HOME,
I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK
BUT I ENDED UP EATING OUT WITH THE GUYS FROM WORK. THAT'S WHEN I STARTED TO FEEL SICK
I THOUGHT ABOUT GOING HOME, OF COURSE.
BUT I COULDN'T

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clench
I CAN'T GO BACK THERE
I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO WHERE TAKASHI IS
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
BUT IT'S JUST TOO MUCH TO TAKE.
AND I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED THAT EVERYONE PREFERS HIM OVER ME.
I KNOW THIS ISN'T HIS FAULT,
I'M SORRY

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I'VE STARTED LOOKING INTO MAYBE GETTING A NEW PLACE FOR MYSELF.
SWEAT
I DON'T REALLY KNOW.
SO, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW...
IF YOU WON'T GO HOME?
HUH?
OF COURSE.
SORRY, BUT...
COULD YOU NOT REPEAT ANY OF THIS TO TAKASHI?
OH!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME THAT.
IT'S NOT LIKE I'M EVEN SEEING HIM ANYMORE.

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WHERE'D YOU EVER GET THAT IDEA?!
OF COURSE WE'RE NOT!
...
ME AND TEN? GOING OUT?
YOU'RE... GOING OUT, AREN'T YOU?
BUT-!
THAT TIME, I SAW YOU IN TEN'S ROOM.
ON THE BED.
THAT WASN'T WHAT YOU THINK!

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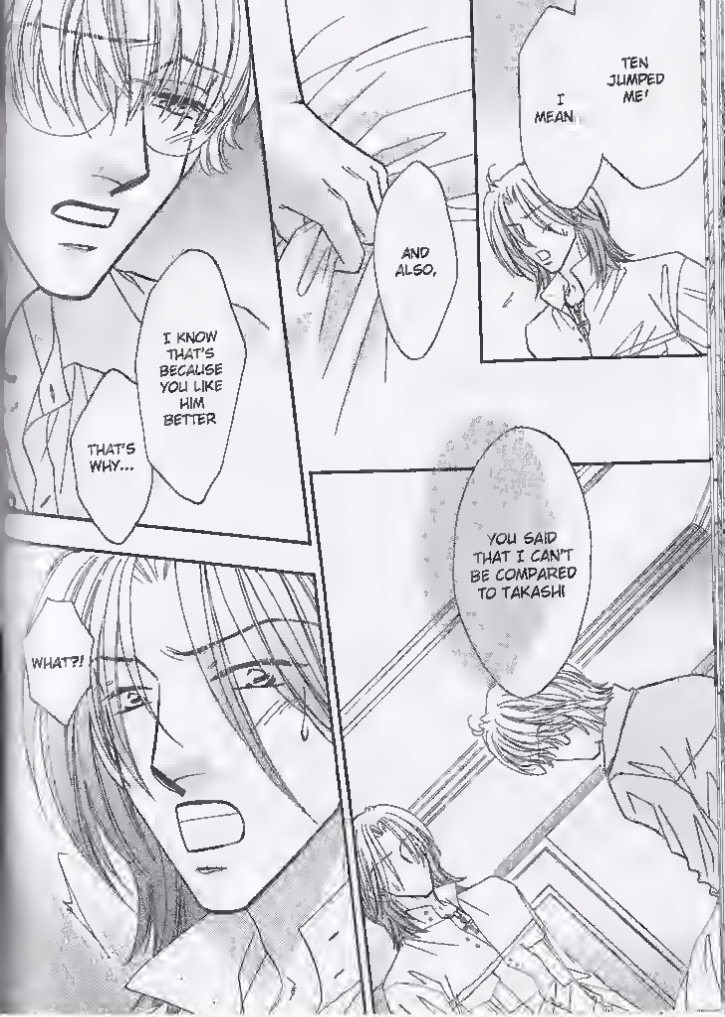

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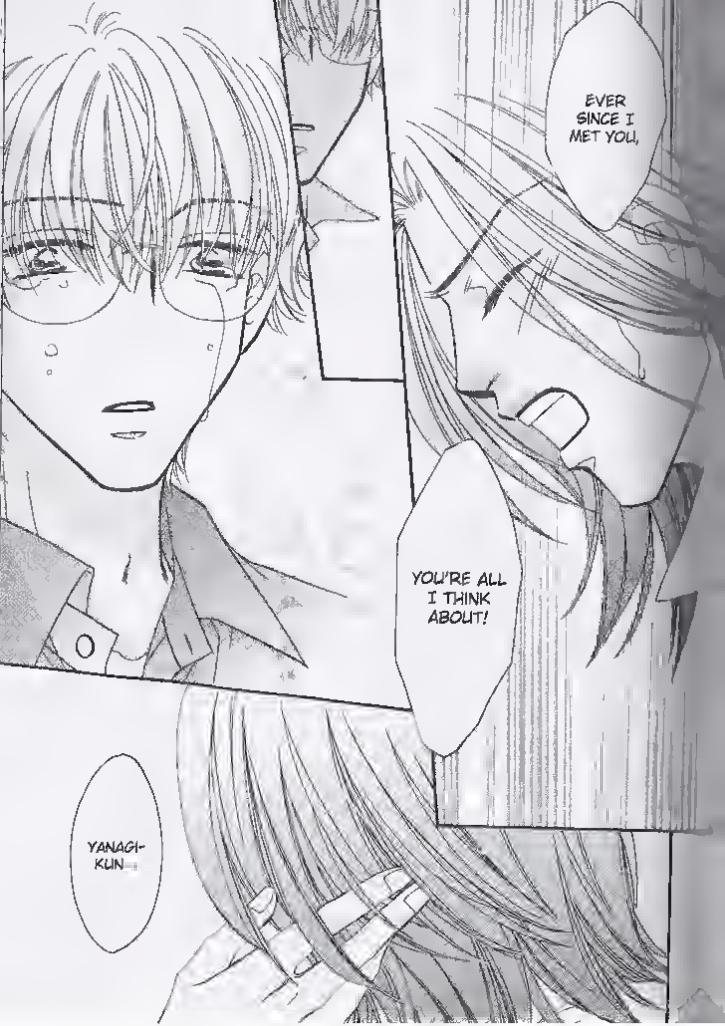

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I CAN NEVER GET YOU OUT OF MY HEAD, YANAGI-KUN
...IT HURT SO MUCH TO BE REJECTED.
THAT'S WHY...
AND YET,
I THOUGHT THAT THIS CAN'T POSSIBLY BE
THIS ENTIRE TIME
ME TOO

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I THOUGHT THAT.
..IF I COULD BE MORE LIKE HIM, PEOPLE WOULD LIKE ME MORE,
AND I WOULD FINALLY MAKE FRIENDS EASIER
BUT I COULDN'T, AND I HATED MYSELF FOR THAT
—
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE LIKE HIM

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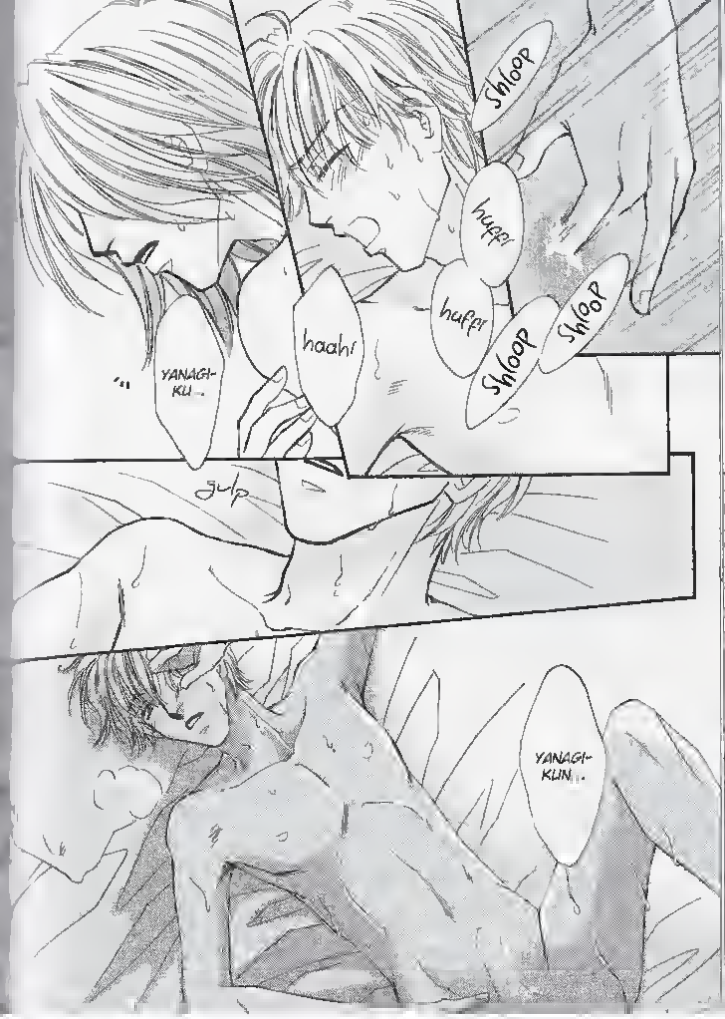

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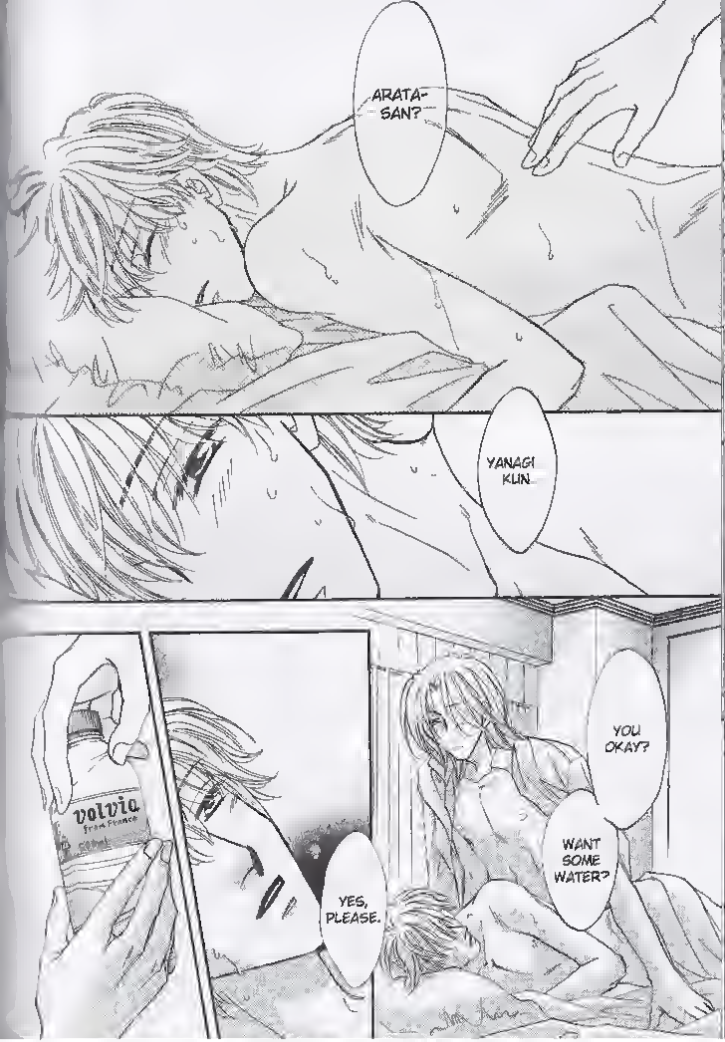

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I GUESS IT'S OBVIOUS I CAN'T GO HOME NOW.
OH.
As long as I have my car, you should be able to, but--
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I HAVEN'T TOLD TAKASHI ANYTHING, SO--
HE MUST BE WORRIED SICK.
twitch
...
YOU'RE A GROWN MAN.
THERE'S NOTHING UNUSUAL ABOUT SPENDING A NIGHT OUT.
Ten--

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WH...
WHY NOT?
...
HUH?
BUT I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD T... HIM YOU W... WITH ME
LOOK, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU HAVE SOME SORT OF INFERIORITY COMPLEX WITH TEN BUT...
REMEMBER WHAT I SAID ABOUT HIM?
...
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
I DON'T KNOW... HOW TO SAY THIS, BUT...
...IF TEN FINDS OUT WHAT WE DID TONIGHT, I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE MIGHT PULL NEXT.

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THAT NIGHT...
...WHEN YOU SAW ME AND TEN TOGETHER,
...WHEN I SAID HE JUMPED ME.
THAT'S WHAT I MEANT...
YAMAGI-KUN!
DRUGGED YOU?
THAT'S... THAT'S INSANE!
HE MUST'VE SLIPPED IT INTO MY DRINK...
...BECAUSE WHEN I CAME TO, I WAS ALREADY IN HIS ROOM
!
HE DRUGGED ME!

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TAKASHI WOULD NEVER DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT
HE DID IT SO THAT YOU WOULD CATCH US IN THE ACT
TEN KNEW
...THAT IF YOU THOUGHT HE AND I WERE TOGETHER,
YOU'D NEVER COME NEAR ME AGAIN.
—!
...!
ARATA-SAN?!

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THAT'S WHY-
MAYBE HE DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE YOU TO ME.
BUT WHAT IF...
YOU'VE GOT IT BACK-WARDS.
...HE DID ALL THAT...
...BECAUSE HE WANTS YOU?
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO THE THREAT IS.
HE'LL NEVER LET YOU GET CLOSE TO ANYONE ELSE.
THE ONE HE CAN'T STAND TO LOSE... IS YOU.
THAT'S WHY HE CUTS THEM OUT OF THE PICTURE

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...
THAT'S ALL HE WANTS TO DO
OH, ARATA-SAN.
HE WAS ALWAYS THERE TO SUPPORT ME WHEN I WAS TOO WEAK
Can it?
Can it really be true?
AL-WAYS!
TAKASHI'S ALWAYS BEEN SO GOOD TO ME
NO...
IT CAN'T BE TRUE

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Takashi was...
...always worried about my well-being.
That's why he never let me do anything
clomp
...
Any-way,
If anything happens, just give me a call
clomp
clomp
When I eventually started to wait for his permission to do things.
I really lost the ability to act for myself
What is it that Takashi wanted with me?
click
click

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Special Thanks

•

YUKI KOJIMA,
HIROMI NAKANE,
KAZUE KOMATSU

EDITOR

•

YUKIKO AI

And everyone who is reading this book now. ♥

Thank you! ♥

So, not only did I get to rewrite a chapter that came out funky when it ran in the magazine, but I also used up all my bonus pages by writing an extra manga story. However, that means you won't be seeing my usual postscript. That's why I thought I'd get in my thanks here. ♥

Thank you to everyone for buying (or borrowing from a friend) this book. ♥ There's only one more volume left of breath. (This time for real!) so I hope you join me for the last installment! ☺

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YESTERDAY...
—AFTER WORK, I WENT OUT WITH EVERYONE FOR DINNER.
UH...
AREN'T YOU GOING TO TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE BEEN ALL NIGHT?
I STARTED FEELING SICK DURING THE MEAL,
I GOT DIZZY AND FAINTED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET
BUT A LITTLE AFTER-WARDS,
SO I EXCUSED MYSELF AND LEFT EARLY

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OH!
BUT IT WASN'T THAT BIG A DEAL
ARE YOU SERIOUS?!
FAINTED?!
AFTER THAT,
I WENT TO SEE A DOCTOR.
HE GAVE ME AN INJECTION
...AND LET ME SPEND THE NIGHT AT THE CLINIC.
BEFORE I KNEW IT, IT WAS ALREADY MORNING.
I SEE.
YEAH.

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BECAUSE YOU'VE HAD SEX FOR THE FIRST TIME,
HUH?
AND SO...
YOUR BODY'S TRICKING YOU, MAKING YOU ONLY THINK IT'S WHAT YOU WANT.
...I'M GOING TO HELP SNAP YOU OUT OF IT.
TAKA-- SHI?

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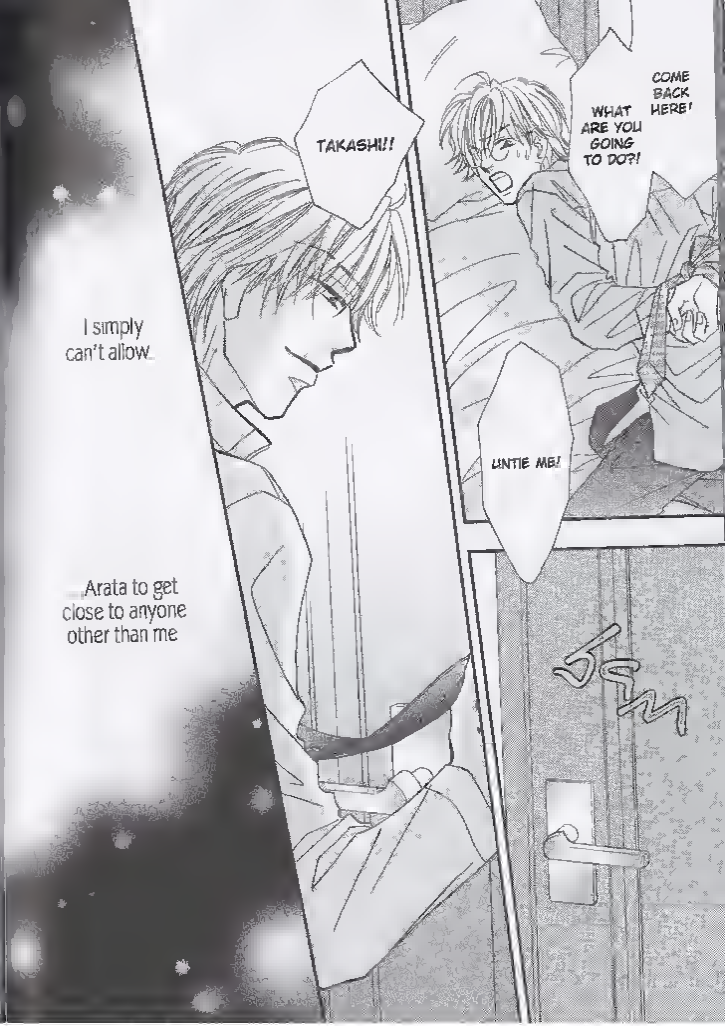

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...
But he'll probably suspect that something's up
And I don't want to give him the chance to see it coming
It worked fine the first time.
It'd be easier to just lure him out with some bait
smirk
beep beep beep beep
CAFE DEL
I THINK I KNOW JUST THE MAN FOR THE JOB

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Heh.
OH, YES.
I'LL HAVE YOUR BEST COFFEE BLEND.
ARE YOU READY TO ORDER, SIR?
JUST SO YOU KNOW, I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME TODAY.
IT IS THE WEEKEND, AFTER ALL.
Hah?
YOU HAVE TO PUT IN SOME FACE TIME FOR THE FAMILY?
flick
SO?
WHAT'D YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT?
DON'T FORGET,
I'M TECHNICALLY A MARRIED MAN.

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BUT WHY ARE YOU ASKING ABOUT KOHSHI?
YEAH
SURE I KNOW THAT
YOU KNOW WHERE KOHSHI LIVES, RIGHT?
I'VE RECENTLY DISCOVERED
THAT HE'S A BIT OF A THIEF.
I HAVE A DUTY TO PUT HIM IN HIS PLACE
... FEELS HE HAS THE RIGHT TO MAKE A PASS AT WHAT'S MINE.
AND WHEN SOMEONE...

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TOUCH MY PRECIOUS BROTHER, AND I'LL KILL YOU.
Yup, yup
HE MAY BE AS CUTE AS YOU, BUT YOU TWO ARE AS DIFFERENT AS NIGHT AND DAY.
THERE'S A FRAGILE FEELING ABOUT HIM
ER.
NOW THEN,
ABOUT THAT FAVOR I HAVE TO ASK OF YOU...

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breath4 / END

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Sorry guys! I didn't mean to leave you hanging like this but I don't own volume 5.....yet. Just two weeks....3 max and I'll have the last volume here for all of you!

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Long ago, in a far away land,
there lived a beautiful princess and her wicked stepmother
MIRROR MIRROR ON THE W...L...
...WHO LOVES SNOW WHITE (KARATA) MOST OF ALL?
Wicked Stepmother Takashi
A Sudden Break with "Snow White"
OOH, THAT'S A DOOSY OF A QUES-TION!
ALL I KNOW IS THAT I COULD USE A LITTLE BIT OF LOVING MYSELF.
OF COURSE THE ANSWER IS ME
ignore
Magic Mirror Akira
So like, there's this really cute guy I've been eyeing, but
Hey, your highness? Are you even listening?
SPEAK-ING OF WHICH,
WHERE DID THAT SNOW WHITE (KARATA) RUN OFF TO NOW?

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NOT LIKE I LOOK FORWARD TO COMING HOME TO THE CASTLE ANYWAY...
My stepmother is sorta intimidating
SHOOT THERE'S NO RE-CEPTION.
Lost in the woods.
Cell phone
OH, WELL.
WHERE THE HECK AM I?
Meanwhile, Snow White was busy with her own problems.
Snow White Arata
Just then, Snow White spotted a quaint woodcutter's cabin nestled in the woods
OH, THANK GOODNESS MAYBE I CAN REST INSIDE FOR A SPELL.
KNOCK KNOCK
HELLO?
KNOCK KNOCK
ANYBODY HOME?
EX-CUSE ME?
Clatch
OH!
IT'S OPEN
Sweet! A bed!
And in the blink of an eye, Snow White fell fast asleep.
zzz

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What. Did. You. Just. Say?!
Mean-while, back at the castle...
Ah! Ah! Ah!
And so, night soon fell on the little hunter's cabin.
K-
KICH!!
IN THAT CASE, LET'S GET A LITTLE HOT AND HEAVY WHILE EVERYONE'S AWAY...
Hunter #5
Prey
Lovey Dovey
Stay with me forever
I will
Oh, your highness! Sometimes you scare me something awful!
My precious Snow White is getting it on with some two-bit lum-berjack?!
Prince Charming Kashin-
Sorry, no role for him.
UH, HELLO?
ANY-ONE?
Little did the newfound lovers know that something dreadful was in store for them.
I'll kill him!
A Sudden Break
-END-

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